

Wog boy moves: Greek-Australian performance and the transnational masculine, 1955-2000

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In October 1955, a year before Australia first hosted the Olympic Games, English director Hugh Hunt chose to direct Euripides' *Medea* for the inaugural production of the recently-founded Australian Drama Company, the nation's short-lived venture in state-subsidised national theatre. Forty-five years later, just prior to the opening of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia's foremost Indigenous theatre director, Wesley Enoch, directed *Black Medea*, a contemporary adaptation of the Medea story told from an Aboriginal perspective. In a nation where one city, Adelaide, once styled itself the 'Athens of the South' and where another city, Melbourne, has boasted the largest Greek population outside of Greece, these two productions establish a frame for considering a history of Greek-Australian performance – a history that articulates relations between a source culture of classical ideals and a cultural context for translocated performance. At different times and in different ways, Hugh Hunt's *Medea* and Wesley Enoch's *Black Medea* negotiated the nation's (post-)colonial condition by re-animating Medea's maternal anguish in appeals to the classicism of ancient Greek drama. Yet these national concerns with maternal myth-making stand apart from a more mundane, more modernist, more masculine manoeuvre in Greek-Australian performance.

The experience of post-war migration provides a second frame for considering a history of Greek-Australian performance. As with the staging of ancient Greek drama to inaugurate an Australian national theatre, the migration of people from Greece and elsewhere to Australia entails a translocation of cultural heritage from one national context to another. Although in the post-war period this was a context in which the modernist project of theatrical realism would succeed the staging of theatrical classics. For even as the *Sydney Morning Herald* commended the Trust's production of *Medea* because only 'great classics of the theatre ... can give us true standards of judgment', it also advised that 'the final ambition should be to find and encourage Australian dramatists who alone can create a truly national theatre that will reflect the life of our own day'. Since the mid-1950s the texts of ancient Greek drama have continued to be embodied as occasional classics in Australian theatrical production. Over the same period, however, the bodies of Greek migrants and their children are among those which have dramatised the 'multicultural real' of Australian everyday life.

Assertively sexualised enactments by Greek-Australian actors in stage productions like *The Heartbreak Kid* (Barrett 1987), *Wogs Out Of Work* (Giannopoulos 1987), and *Milk And Honey* (Andreas 1994) and in feature films like *Head On* (1998), *The Wog Boy* (2000) and *Fat Pizza* (2003) have cultivated a transnational masculinity rendered recognisable in an energetic kinaesthetic of 'wog boy moves'. The formation of this transnational masculinity, which also draws on Italian, Lebanese, Maltese, Macedonian and Turkish experience in Australia, may be traced to the post-war migration to Australia of men from the Mediterranean and to anxieties about their arrival disrupting the gender-order of Anglo-Australian life. In the 1950s and 1960s, these anxieties animated performances of such new Australian plays as *The Shifting Heart* (Beynon 1957), *The Bastard Country* (Coburn 1959), *The Promised Woman* (Patrikareas 1963/2000) and *The Young Wife* (Martin 1966) and such anxieties still resonate in more recent works. Erotically charged and anxiety inducing, the emergence of a transnational masculinity may be in counter response to an aestheticised Anglo-Australian investment

in classical culture rendered explicit in such productions as Charles Jury's *The Administrator* (1955) about the Greek tyrant Dionysius, Brian Nason's version of *The Bacchoi* (1970) or Michael Gow's anarchic play on Greek love in *Live Acts On Stage* (1996). Drawing on archival research into Australian theatre history, this illustrated paper explores relations between Australian imaginings of ancient Greek theatre and a culture's erotic investment in the transnational masculinity enacted among others by Greek-Australian men.